

CRÓNICAS DE MILK

FOR

DUSTIN LANCE BLACK

DANNY GLICKER

JAMES FRANCO

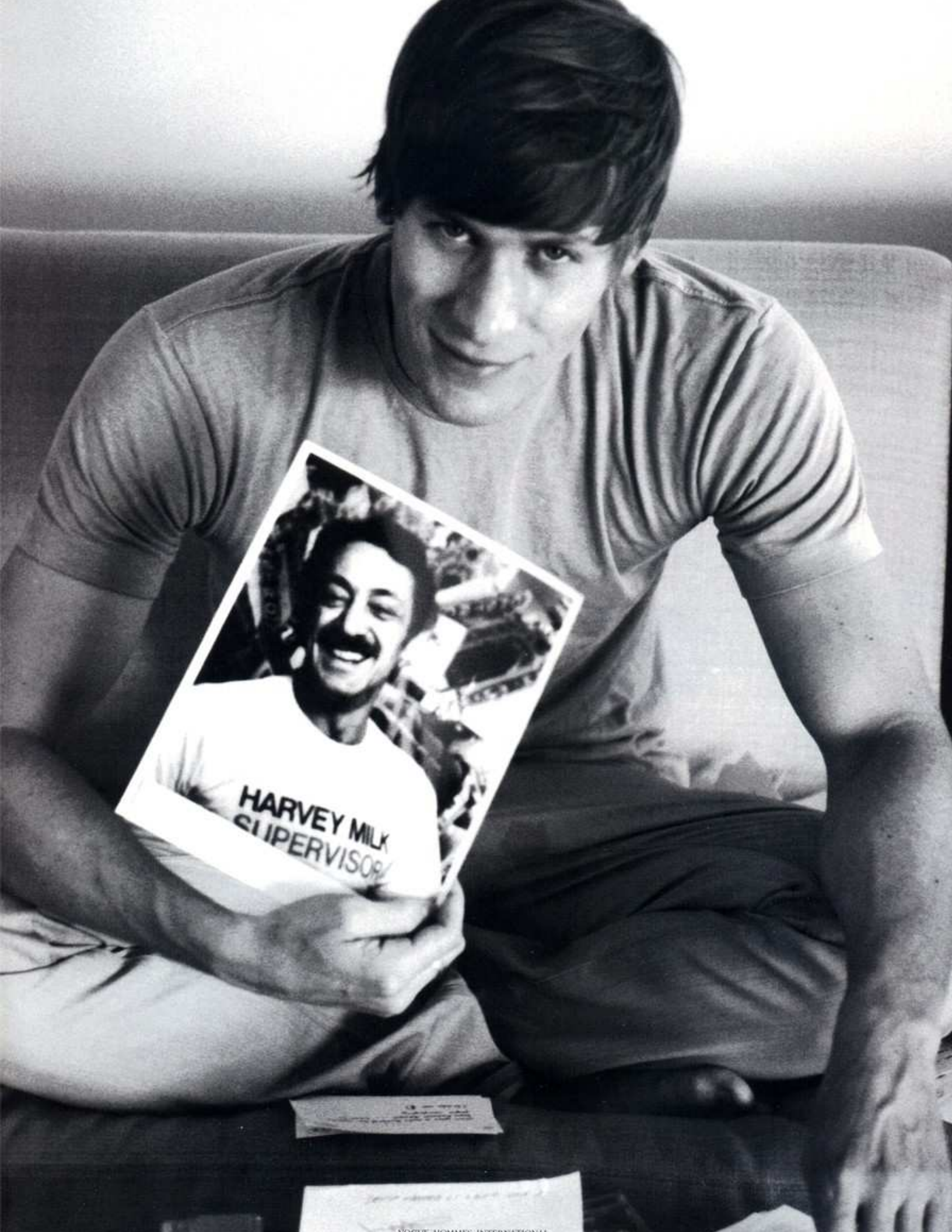
BILL GROOM

GUS VAN SANT



NEVER BLEND IN





HARVEY MILK
SUPERVISOR

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Small, illegible text on a piece of paper or card.

MILK Project

For this issue of VOGUE HOMMES INTERNATIONAL, Gus Van Sant has chosen to photograph Lance Black, the young screenwriter with whom he has just completed filming on his biopic of HARVEY MILK, the first openly gay politician in the history of the United States.

The author of "ELEPHANT" and "LAST DAYS", which stars Sean Penn, took over control of the long-awaited project, originally the brainchild of director Oliver Stone.

BY PHILIPPE GARNIER
PHOTOGRAPHS GUS VAN SANT

3/30/73



Francis -
thanks for last night.
I know it helped me &
I hope you enjoyed it
too—

warmly
Harry







HARVEY MILK

May 22, 1930 - November 27, 1978

Harvey Milk made history as the first openly-gay elected official in California, and one of the first in the nation, when he won election to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in November 1977. His camera store and campaign headquarters at 575 Castro Street and his apartment upstairs were centers of community activism for a wide range of human rights, environmental, labor and neighborhood issues. Harvey Milk's hard work and accomplishments on behalf of all San Franciscans earned him widespread respect and support. His life is an inspiration to all people committed to equal opportunity and an end to bigotry.

"You gotta give 'em hope!"

“When HARVEY MILK became the first openly gay official elected in this country, he gave a famous speech, saying that this wasn’t his victory, but that of minorities everywhere. ‘Somewhere in Des Moines or San Antonio, there is a kid listening to this, and he’s got two choices: one is coming to San Francisco or else staying where he is and fighting.’”

LANCE BLACK

Although there is a pool and a view of the Griffith Observatory, Gus Van Sant’s house in the Hollywood Hills recalls his loft in Portland: the same clean lines, big uncluttered spaces. For the man himself, the usual T-shirt and jeans, bare feet on wooden floors, the usual taciturn welcome, only ruptured by a feisty long-haired dog. And by Lance Black, a small lanky fast-talking blond youth, blue-eyed and handsome, who was recently on the HBO *Big Love* writing staff. Gus had asked him to join us, and I was just parking in front of the house when Lance’s BMW piled right behind me. After proudly showing us his new acquisition of a great Larry Fink print, Van Sant explained why he’d chosen to shoot Lance for *Vogue Hommes International*. “I didn’t want to pose, so I took photographs of Lance, as he was the source for the film. Besides, he’s a better sitter.” Black opines emphatically, laughing, before relating the circumstances of their first meeting, and the reasons he wrote the Milk script.

Gus had just bought the house. “There were movers all over the place,” Black recalls, “and we helped carry stuff in, which I welcomed, as I was so nervous... I grew up outside of San Antonio, Texas. My father was in the military and I was raised a Mormon, so it wasn’t the greatest of environments for growing up gay. But when Harvey Milk became the first openly gay public official elected in this country, he gave a famous speech, saying this wasn’t his victory, but that of minorities everywhere. ‘Somewhere in Des Moines or San Antonio’, he said, ‘there is a kid listening to this, and he’s got two choices: one is coming to San Francisco, or else staying where he is and fighting.’ I’ve always thought I was that kid, at least I went to San Francisco, where I worked in the theatre world and heard a lot about Milk, who’d become a kind of father figure for me. I knew there was a film project going, but when nothing came of it I started my own research and talking to people.”

“I’ve been interested in Harvey Milk for at least 15 years,” Van Sant takes up, “ever since Warner contacted me to replace Oliver Stone, who initi-

ated the project. There had been any number of scripts, and Robin Williams was to star in it. The thing never got made, but the story always remained a possibility for me. I’d stayed in touch with people, one of them was Cleve Jones, one of Milk’s lieutenants. It’s Cleve who brought me Lance and his script, and for me it clicked, because I felt this was the right time for it. There had been a lot of sadness and anger,

and although I was daunted by the political nature of the script, Lance’s daring also brought solutions to what I’d always thought was problematic in all the other versions, which were cluttered with details and wanted to touch on all of Harvey’s life. Lance concentrates on him only once he’s in San Francisco, and on the Movement. We don’t mention his life in New York, Wall Street or his being stage manager on *Hair*.

“All of which is wonderful,” says Lance Black, “but you had to choose. Just as we don’t tell Dan White’s story, except in as much as he kills Milk and Mayor Moscone. Although it is also interesting.”

“For me,” Van Sant decrees, “the story is that of a guy who is cut out for the job of politician – Harvey – and this other one who wasn’t. That’s their story, which is finally more interesting than if White had been a homophobic bigot. I never heard of Milk until he was shot, somehow I wasn’t enough in the gay life. I remember I was driving somewhere on the East Coast when I heard the news.”

When Gus had to push his starting dates because Sean Penn was going to star in *Pinkville* (ironically an Oliver Stone movie, now with Bruce Willis), he lost Matt Damon, who was to play White. Josh Brolin replaced him, and the cast features other stars, like Mexican heartthrob Diego Luna (*Y Tu Mamá También*). Milk will be released in the US on 26th November, on the eve of the 30th anniversary of the double assassination. In spite of a relatively tight budget (\$20 million), Van Sant ended up not having to rely as much on archive footage as he originally thought he would have to for the crowd movements.

“My best memory”, says Black, “is the night of the candlelit march, when some 5,000 people showed up in their Seventies clothes, and stayed for hours and hours. For free, as we couldn’t pay for extras. I felt doubly gratified, because when I first talked to people there had been this wariness, as so many film projects had never materialised. But as soon as we got into production, the community was behind us.” —

MILK and his legacy

BY BRUCE BENDERSON

You have to live in San Francisco – which I did, from 1969 to 1974 – to understand that city. Tucked away in a northwesterly corner of the American continent, it happily escapes the timeline of European history and invents its own perverse, celebrative cultures, yet almost constantly fails to export them to the rest of the country. This is the secret of San Francisco's originality. Since no one's interested, the city remains eternally individualistic. It must be the only city in the world where I could once overhear a fetishistically clad young man say to another, "You know what I found out today? S&M wasn't invented in San Francisco! Somebody named Sade invented it a long time ago." "You mean the singer?" answered his companion, confusing the Marquis with the soulful Afro-British songstress Sade, whose name is spelled the same, though pronounced "shar-day".

One major exception to this joyous, isolated San Francisco iconoclasm is Harvey Milk, one of the first openly gay politicians in American history. By no standards was Milk – born in 1930 – ever an "underground" kind of guy. Appearing most often in a budget suit of a distinctly non-European cut, or riding on the back of an open convertible to celebrate gay liberation in a T-shirt and jeans, Milk never looked much different from your typical local politician. As a gay liberationist, he was no drag queen, flamboyant effeminate or leather-clad fetishist, but was, instead, a genuine, generic "regular guy", who had emigrated from Long Island to San Francisco in 1972, at the peak of pre-AIDS gay culture, in order to open a camera shop on famously gay Castro Street and settle down with a male lover. Before the assassination that immortalised Milk for ever, he wasn't a politician on a national level, either, but merely an elected member of San Francisco's Board of Supervisors, the city government body. His vaguely left agenda, which supported minorities, women, the elderly and union members, but stressed gay rights above all, wouldn't in the slightest be considered radical today.

It took a bullet from a Catholic, family-minded ex-supervisor, who had resigned from the Board out of frustration and then been denied the reinstatement he requested, to immortalise Harvey Milk. Dan White was a firefighter turned politician who had grown up in a working-class San Francisco neighbourhood. He belonged to the stable blue-collar population that had watched San Francisco being transformed from a hard-working maritime community into a kooky playground for decadent

hippies and gays. A Democrat like Milk, Dan White initially supported some of his leftish policies, but after a falling-out between the two over a land-zoning initiative, he began to feel like the odd man out. This he increasingly held against Milk and other liberal members of the Board of Supervisors, and also against Mayor George Moscone, another native San Franciscan of blue-collar origin.

On 27th November, 1978, after arguing unsuccessfully with Mayor Moscone about getting his job on the Board of Supervisors reinstated, White shot Moscone to death, then walked down the hall and killed Harvey Milk, too. At his trial, the jury agreed to reduce the charges from first-degree murder to manslaughter. Any homophobia that may have played a part was obscured, and White was sentenced to only seven years in prison with the possibility of time off for good behaviour. This is the reason cited for the White Night Riot that later occurred in San Francisco on the eve of Milk's birthday, on 21st May, 1979, when members of the gay community rushed to City Hall to set fire to police cars and smash car windows.

Two years after serving his prison sentence, White committed suicide by pumping carbon monoxide into his car to the tune of an Irish folk song played in continuous loop on the car speakers. By then, Harvey Milk's memory was already being preserved for posterity, and he was being hailed by the mainstream as a "champion for human rights". *Time Magazine* named him one of the "100 Most Important People of the Century"; alternative schools such as the Harvey Milk High School in New York City took his name; and a bust of his likeness was permanently installed in the San Francisco City Hall.

As a result of all these accolades, the mist has never cleared over the real achievements of Harvey Milk. In reality, Milk's efforts did attain several important prizes on their own. For example, he was instrumental in defeating the notorious Briggs Amendment, which had sought to ban homosexuals from teaching in Californian schools.

Of course, his greatest influence on American culture, history and politics was more nebulous and was based on his "out-and-proud" support of the struggle for gay rights. Yet it was his death, rather than any efforts during his lifetime, that won this struggle its most impressive successes. Milk himself expressed this best when, fearing assassination, he wrote, "If a bullet should enter my brain, let that bullet destroy every closet door." —



MILK

DURLEY LAMAR BLAKE

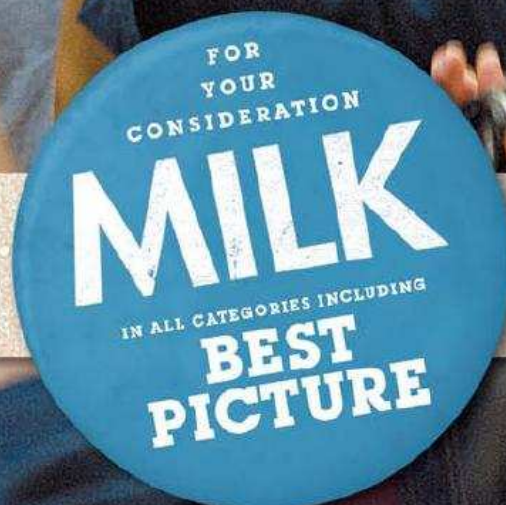
Focus Features thanks the Costume Designers Guild and proudly congratulates Danny Glicker for his Costume Designers Guild award nomination for Excellence in Period Film

“Milk’ is a marvel.

Everything is happening here – votes are tallied, hearts broken, lives risked and saved, tactical decisions made, emotions expressed and suppressed – but only one thing is happening. What makes all of this cohere is art, and history. This is how change happens. This is what it looks like.”

★ A.O. SCOTT, THE NEW YORK TIMES ★

BEST COSTUME DESIGN
Danny Glicker



groundswell
PRODUCTIONS

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For up-to-the-minute screening information, go to:
www.FilmInFocus.com/awards08

MILK

Costume Designer: **DANNY GLICKER**

Assistant Designer: **AUDREY FISHER (L.A. PREP)**

Any surprises? How few people remembered Harvey Milk or his accomplishments. **Hardest to accomplish?** Re-creating the suit that Harvey was murdered in. Handling his actual suit with dried blood and bullet holes was a humbling reminder of what my job was—to accurately re-create the life of a vital man, not some icon. **Easiest?** Re-creating the outfits of Cleve Jones, Anne Kronenberg, and Danny Nicoletta. They were always on set to answer my endless questions! **What couldn't you live without?** The term "mishegas." It takes the edge off any stressful situation. **Biggest career challenge to date?** Staying calm and focused while knee-deep in Mishegas.

DANNY GLICKER

BY COLLEEN NIKA AND ALEX GARTENFELD – INTERVIEW MAGAZINE

1. What were your main sources of inspiration for the film's looks?

The real life of Harvey Milk and culture of 1970s San Francisco. I poured over countless documents, stacks and stacks of images depicting the real people and events, and did everything within my power to meticulously organize them into their proper timeline and recreate the people and the thriving San Francisco scene.

2. Who would you love to dress for this year's Oscars and how would you dress them?

Harvey Milk! Were he still with us, he would have LOVED all the attention. He would have completely embraced the theatricality of the most photographed event of the year to publicize every issue important to him. I see his rented tux covered in "OVERTURN PROP 8" pins.

3. What ensemble in Milk do you think best captures the essence of the main character?

The iconic outfit Harvey wears for Gay Freedom Day. A clean white T-Shirt with red trim that reads "I'll Never Go Back!" over a picture of a closet door nailed shut, and a homemade black felt armband with pink triangle. Harvey literally wore his heart on his sleeve.

4. How would you have costumed this film differently if it were one year ago? Ten years ago?

One year ago, I would have done everything exactly as I did—this project was just too important to screw up, and while we were making it, my life was all about telling Harvey's story. Ten years ago—I'd rather not imagine how that would have turned out! I've had to use all that I've learned in the past ten years to make the costumes look the way they did.

5. How much input did the director and cast have in the wardrobe decisions?

I worked very closely with Gus Van Sant and all the actors, especially Sean Penn. I loved that Sean had such a powerful investment in his transformation, and we enjoyed a really close collaboration. I gave him a thick binder of photo research in the proper time line, and it was fascinating to go into the research with him and discover the revealing details.

6. Levi's are so omnipresent in the film that they almost become their own character. How do Levi's encapsulate the sensibilities of Milk and San Francisco?

Levi's are so iconic to both San Francisco, and especially to the mystique of the "Castro Clone." It was really fun to play with all the authentic denim of the 70s. We squeezed, and I mean squeezed those guys into their 501's, and when they're that tight, nothing is left to the imagination. There's a reason the look was so popular.

7. I imagine you did a lot of vintage shopping while dressing the cast. What were some your best finds?

I was responsible for dressing literally thousands of people, and I really wanted to recreate the grunge and filth of the early 70's, so I visited a lot of untapped dumps. Filthy, nameless warehouses, but gold-mines of amazing vintage stuff that hasn't seen the light of day since the 70's. When the nominations were announced, I called my dear friend Audrey Fisher, who worked as my assistant designer for prep, and said "Could you believe this all started with garbage bags full of crap in the back of a u haul?"

8. 70s silhouettes and jeans are back in style. In Milk, James Franco and Emile Hirsch make a pretty strong case for long hair and moustaches. What do you think?

The actors in *Milk* are an extremely handsome and talented bunch of guys -- I'd be hard pressed to think of a trend they can't inspire.



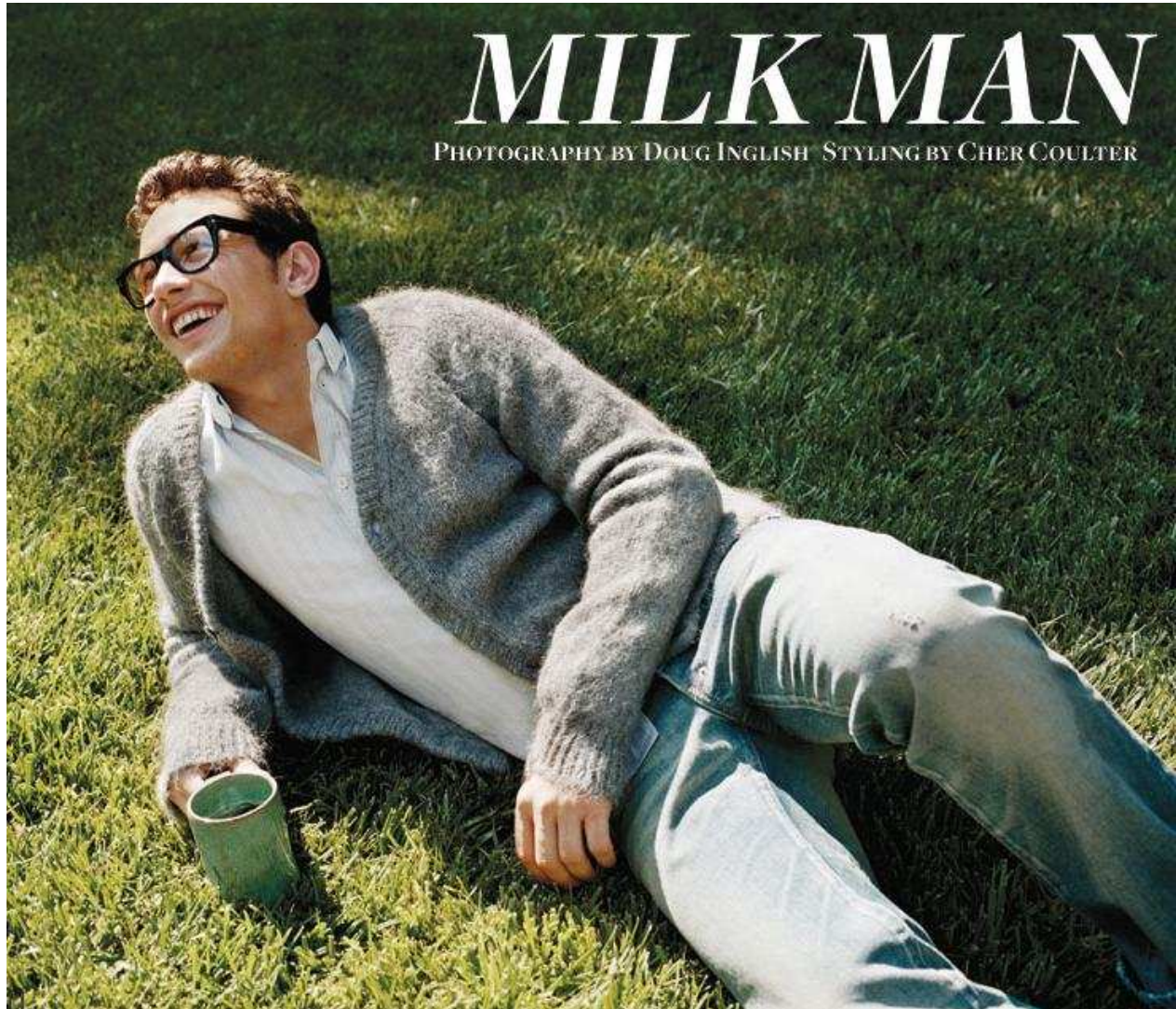
Sketches for the Costumes for Milk

DANNY GLICKER'S SKETCHES

FEATURE STORY

James Franco interviewed by Dustin Lance Black

Spider-Man's main man, James Franco, steals Sean Penn's heart in one of this year's most anticipated movies, Milk, Gus Van Sant's biopic about slain California politician Harvey Milk.



Harvey Milk has finally been given his due. Thirty years after the San Francisco politician's assassination, Gus Van Sant's *Milk*, starring Sean Penn in the title role and James Franco as his longtime partner, Scott Smith, hits movie theaters November 26. Called "the first openly gay man elected to any substantial political office in the history of the planet" by *Time* magazine, Milk was elected to the San Francisco board of supervisors in 1977 and was gunned down inside City Hall along with San Francisco mayor George Moscone a year later. Daniel White, an antigay city supervisor who had resigned earlier that week, confessed to the crime hours later, claiming that junk food had exacerbated his depression, creating what became known as "the Twinkie defense." Convicted of manslaughter, White was sentenced to just seven years in prison and was paroled after serving five. Smith was Milk's stabilizing force during his political rise, and the character is ultimately *Milk's* unifying element, with Franco delicately supporting Penn's sublime performance throughout. For *Out*, Franco and *Milk* screenwriter and executive producer Dustin Lance Black, who goes by Lance, talk about the making of the film.

Lance Black: I don't know if it was you or Gus who told me that *My Own Private Idaho* originally inspired you to act?

James Franco: I probably told you. If Gus told you that, I'd be really touched that he would know.

Lance: I guess the deeper question is, What made you want to do *Milk* and work with Gus?

James: Well, let me talk about Idaho first, because -- I would watch that movie a lot, even before I was acting. For some reason that struck a chord with me. I know it's an incredibly important film for queer cinema, but I wasn't a young teenager waiting to come out. I don't know what it was. It was just --

Lance: It wasn't just important for gay cinema --

James: No --

Lance: I think that's the whole idea of the movie -- it transcends the gay market with these sort of homoerotic story lines, right?

James: Exactly. I know a lot of straight guys who loved that movie and had the same attachment to it that I did. So very early on I was a huge fan of Gus -- *Idaho* and *Drugstore Cowboy*. Matt Dillon and River Phoenix in those movies are in some ways so off-the-wall, but Gus puts them in a certain context where it's completely believable. So it's both moving and hilarious at times. But compared to *Drugstore Cowboy*, *My Own Private Idaho* -- I guess just the emotions it touches on made me want to watch it over and over.

Lance: Yeah, me too. That was the first movie I saw of Gus's. I was totally in love with River

Phoenix, and then I was surprised by this movie that totally changed my idea of American cinema. It was beautiful.

James: Actually, I saw it and I was like, "I worship River Phoenix," and then I was like, "I want to play a homeless character. I want to play a gay character!" It's the one role I wish I could have done, if I were to think of any.

Lance: Had you met Gus before?

James: Yeah. We have a mutual friend, Ben, a painter whose loft I would paint at. I don't know how close they were, but they were definitely friends, and he was always talking about Gus -- it was the year *Elephant* won at Cannes. I was doing a little play, *The Ape*, that I'd cowritten, and Ben brought Gus. And that's basically all I remember from the whole run of that little play -- Gus Van Sant came and saw the play.



"I would watch [*My Own Private Idaho*] a lot, even before I was acting. For some reason it struck a chord with me. I know it's an incredibly important film for queer cinema, but I wasn't a young teenager waiting to come out. I guess the emotions it touches on made me want to watch it over and over."

Lance: Gus told me about that. When he first brought up your name as someone to play Scott, he said, "Oh, you know I saw this play, this great play." And he said, "You know who's a really good writer, and we might let him read your script?" And I said "Who?" and he said your name and talked about *The Ape*.

James: When I was in San Francisco and Gus brought up *The Ape* again, it was like, "Wow!" Just that he remembered it made doing that little play all worth it.

Lance: How did you come across *Milk*?

James: I heard Gus was going to make it, so I wrote him and I was like, "Gus, I haven't talked to you in a while, but basically I'll do whatever you want in this movie - I'd just like to be a part of it." So he sent me a script and I read it and I loved it.

Lance: Had you heard of Harvey Milk?

James: They didn't really teach you about him in school. After I heard Gus was going to do the movie, I watched the documentary *The Times of Harvey Milk*. And then I asked my parents about it, because they went to Stanford and then stayed in Palo Alto, so they were around at the time and certainly aware of everything. It was definitely in the air where I grew up, but it wasn't taught like Martin Luther King.

Lance: Yeah, not then. But potentially now.

James: Hopefully now. That's one of the great things about the movie finally coming out -- just raising awareness.

Lance: All right, so you always wanted to work with Gus. Did you know about his style of directing? Were there any surprises there?

James: I'm such a big fan. Whenever I had a chance to talk to him, I basically just grilled him on everything -- about every movie. I think he likes talking about his movies, and I mean I did everything -- I did my research. I read his novel, *Pink*. He has a commentary [on the DVD] for *My Own Private Idaho*, but for some reason they didn't sync it to the movie, so it's just an audio recording of him and Todd Haynes. So you just have to sit there and listen to the hour-and-a-half or two-hour discussion between them. For me it was incredible. So I knew a lot of the stories just from grilling him.

Lance: Generally, you only know when he's unhappy. It's the difference between a grin and grimace -- which for him is very subtle.

James: I didn't do a ton of improvising, but I felt like if I wanted to say something I could. There were a few times when I threw something out and Gus would be like, "Yeah...maybe you try not saying that next time." [Laughs] But other than that it seemed like he was really into any improv, whether it's behavior or a line here or there.

Lance: One of the challenges is that Scott Smith is no longer alive. As a writer, [scenes between Milk and Smith were] difficult for me to write because you really have to create them out of whole cloth. What did you do to research playing a gay man in the '70s?



James: There are two parts of that research: one -- the more general research of the time and place and what it was like to be a gay man in the Castro at that time. And the other side was to research Scott himself. And that was tricky. There's a big thank-you and acknowledgement in the front of [Randy Shilts's book] *The Mayor of Castro Street*, but there weren't a ton of stories about him. And then in [Rob Epstein's 1984 documentary] *The Times of Harvey Milk*, he's in it for like five seconds -- he and Harvey kiss, and that's it. So I was having dinner with Rob Epstein and Sean Penn, and I asked Rob if he had any other footage of Scott that hadn't made it into the movie, and Rob is so thorough that he had all these pre-interviews of people who ended up not being interviewed in the film. He had one of Scott from only two or three years after Harvey's death, and so it was

perfect material on him. I'm also always a tiny bit skeptical when I hear stories about a real person, because everybody's got their own take on it. When I played James Dean everybody would fight about what the real story was.

Lance: Right, that's tricky.

James: I just tried to talk to [Milk associates] Danny Nicoletta and Cleve Jones and others to get as many perspectives on him as I could. I think Scott was Harvey's longest relationship -- the fact that Scott and Harvey moved out from New York to San Francisco together, the fact that they worked on the early campaigns for Harvey -- it seemed like there was a fairly deep relationship there and they really cared about each other. And so I think that's the Scott we captured in the movie. Harvey was incredibly ambitious and sometimes had these crazy kinds of schemes, and Scott was always there to be the emotional grounding and support.



"My other hero on the film was Sean, so it wasn't too hard to look up to him—or whatever that is. Basically I've been in love with Sean Penn since *The Beaver Trilogy*."

Lance: You fell in love with Sean? Is that what you're saying?

James: Basically, I've been in love with him since even before *Fast Times*. He did this little thing called *The Beaver Trilogy*.

Lance: I have seen that! I can't believe you've seen that -- no one has seen that.

James: So, basically I've been in love with Sean Penn since *The Beaver Trilogy*. [*Squealing girls interrupt in the background, saying, "I told you it was him! Hi, James Franco! Congrats on getting into the program! You're so great!"*]

James: Thank you! [*Laughs*]

Lance: It's got to be hard to be James Franco.

James: I'm sitting on the steps of Brooklyn College. I just had my first writing class. So they were congratulating me for getting into the program. I'm taking an MFA writing program, and also a film directing MFA program at NYU.

Lance: Oh, my God. That's even more than you were taking while we were shooting *Milk*.

James: Yeah. While I was doing *Milk*, that was a little crazy. Somehow it worked. There were some days when we were doing night shoots when I would fly from San Francisco to L.A. in the morning, go to class, and then go from UCLA to the airport, fly back, and then work on *Milk*, but whatever.

Lance: You're a workaholic. You're going to take my writing jobs away from me.

James: If I keep writing things like *The Ape*, I think you're safe.

Lance: Oh, I want to know what your perception of the vibe on the set was, because we had a lot of straight actors.

James: For me, it seemed like everybody got into it. I was blown away by how meticulous Sean is about the look of the character and the voice and the sound -- just all the care that took. Just how dedicated he was. And then it seemed to me like Emile [Hirsch] -- he was playing young Cleve Jones, who was kind of a young badass -- he wasn't a shy character. So I think Emile really liked being that out there. I don't know if I should talk about Emile, but I think he even asked for that make-out scene with Joseph Cross. And for me it was like, *Here I am in Gus's movie, and I'm finally getting as close to being in My Own Private Idaho as I'm going to get, so I'll do whatever*. Not a ton is shown in the movie, but there's a scene where I'm naked in the pool and everybody else is dressed and there's just something uncomfortable about that. I felt like the girl in all those teen movies that pops out of the hot tub topless. [Laughs] I was like, *All right, it's Gus Van Sant. I'll do whatever*. I was just happy to be there.

"There's a scene where I'm naked in the pool and everybody else is dressed and there's just something uncomfortable about that. I felt like the girl in those teen movies that pops out of the hot tub topless. I was like, *All right, it's Gus Van Sant. I'll do whatever*. I was just happy to be there."



Lance: Culturally, I thought it was interesting that no one seemed to be cringing or wiping their mouth or getting terrifically freaked out about playing a gay role.

James: Um, we did a little bit. I think Sean and I had the first kiss of the film, and there were like 200 people watching on Castro Street. I was a little nervous. And it was a long kiss.

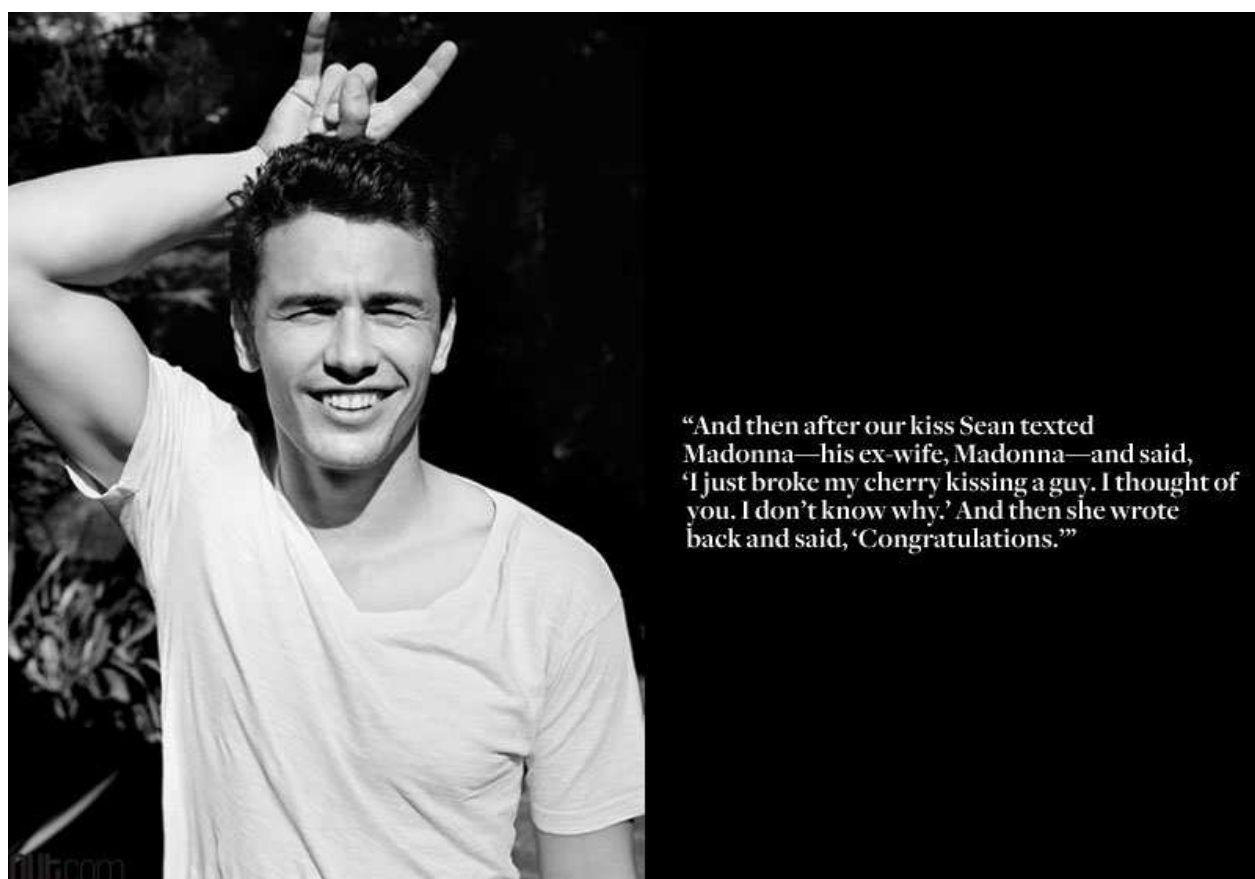
Lance: That was the three-minute kiss out in front of the entire population of Castro Street, not shut down. Everyone in the Castro came out to watch James Franco and Sean Penn make out.

James: Armistead Maupin came down to watch! *[Laughing]* So that was weird. It'd be weird kissing a girl in front of all those people. After the first kiss, it broke the ice. And then after our kiss Sean texted Madonna -- his ex-wife, Madonna -- and said, "I just broke my cherry kissing a guy. I thought of you. I don't know why." And then she wrote back and said, "Congratulations."

Lance: You broke Sean Penn's gay cherry.

James: I did. I did. Now, wait, Lance. Let me think of something to ask you.

Lance: To ask me? They're not taking my picture for the cover of *Out* magazine. ●●●



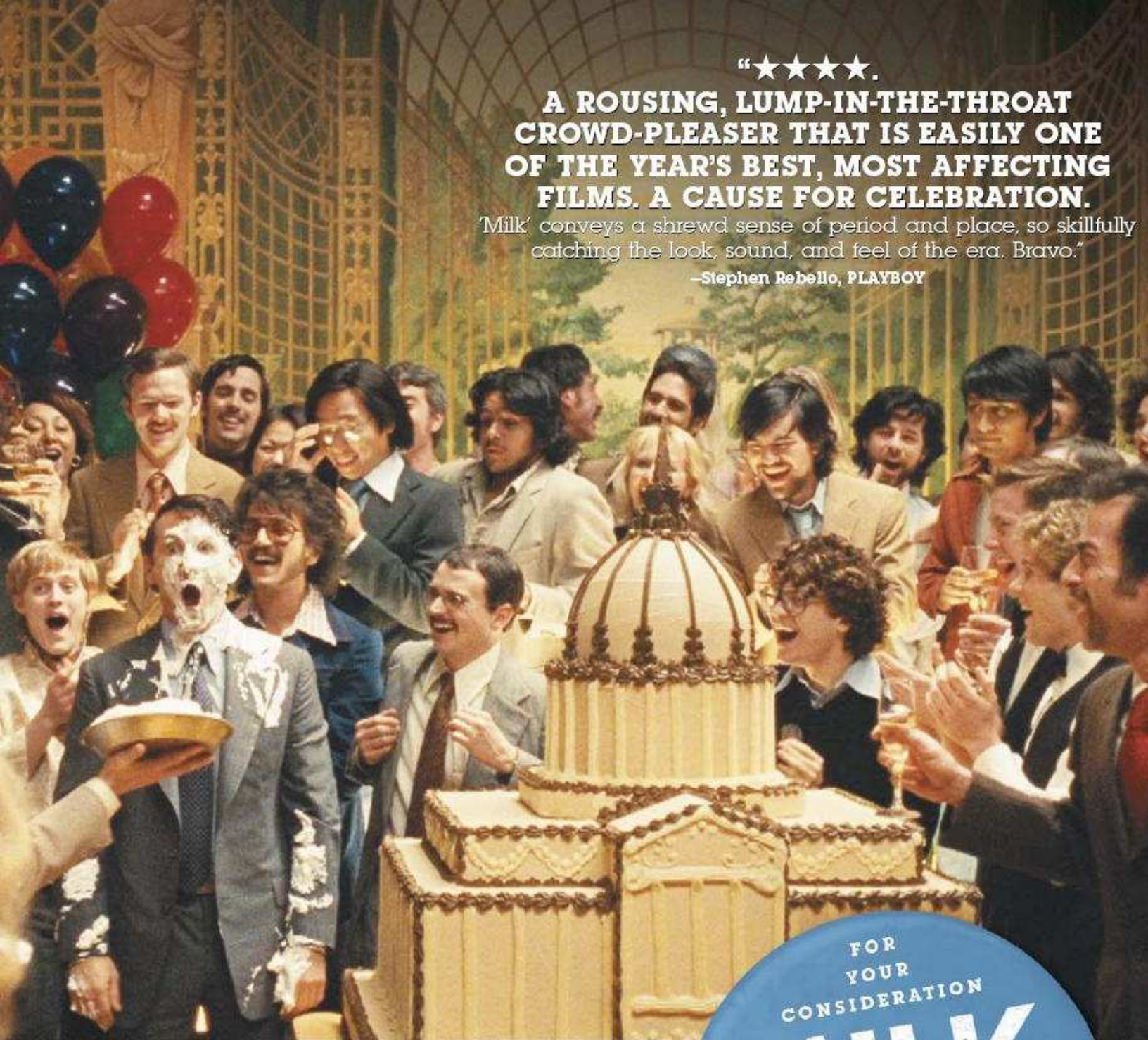
Milk Man.
Published by Out Magazine.

“★★★★.

**A ROUSING, LUMP-IN-THE-THROAT
CROWD-PLEASER THAT IS EASILY ONE
OF THE YEAR'S BEST, MOST AFFECTING
FILMS. A CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION.**

*'Milk' conveys a shrewd sense of period and place, so skillfully
catching the look, sound, and feel of the era. Bravo."*

—Stephen Rebello, *PLAYBOY*



BEST ART DIRECTION

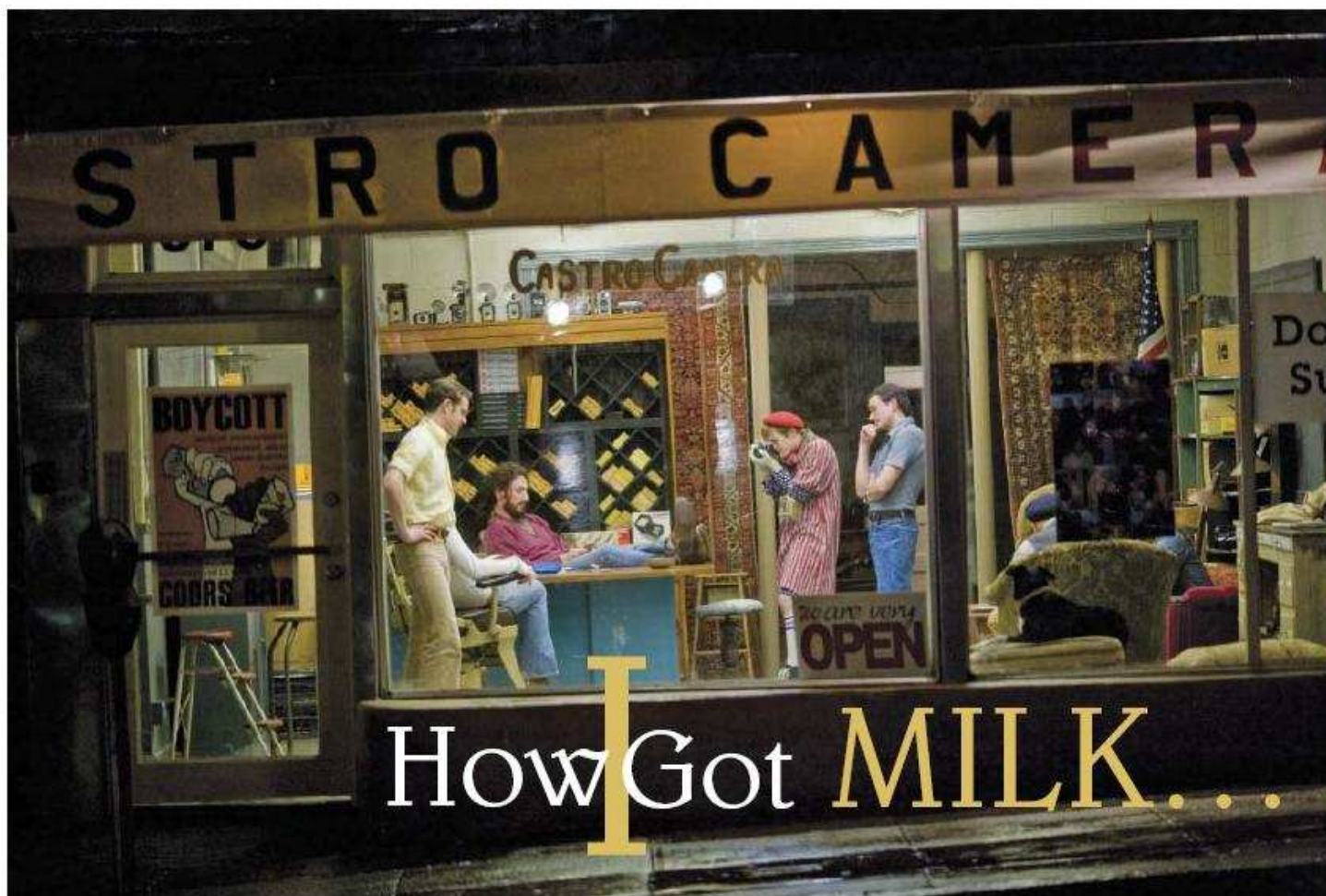
Bill Groom
PRODUCTION DESIGNER

Barbara Munch, S.D.S.A.
SET DECORATOR

FOR
YOUR
CONSIDERATION
MILK
IN ALL CATEGORIES INCLUDING
**BEST
PICTURE**

For up-to-the-minute screening information, to read Dustin Lance Black's original screenplay, hear Danny Elfman's score
and learn more about this extraordinary film from director Gus Van Sant, go to: www.FilmInFocus.com/awards08

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Images © Focus Features

by Bill Groom, Production Designer

Above: Harvey Milk's Castro Camera store, carefully re-created for the film on the site of the original location with many historic details, including an old red couch and Milk's barber chair. Within the film, the store becomes his campaign headquarters and goes through a complex series of redecorations as he becomes central to the Castro District's gay community. At night, between filming days, the security guards reported seeing people come up, especially older people, who would peer in the window and begin to weep.

On an April day in 2007, I had just left my agent's office in Beverly Hills. As I was pulling out onto Sunset Boulevard heading east, my cell phone rang. It was my art director and friend, Charley Beal, back in New York. He was breathless. "They're making the Harvey Milk story," he said, "AND GUESS WHO'S PRODUCING IT! DAN AND BRUCE! You have to call them right away. This could be big!"

Three years earlier, Dan Jinks and Bruce Cohen had produced *The Forgotten*, which my friend Joe Ruben directed and I designed. Charley was the Assistant Art Director and has been my Art Director on almost every project since. As we were wrapping *The Forgotten*, Dan and Bruce were preparing to produce a television pilot for Showtime that I designed.

Harvey Milk, Harvey Milk, Harvey Milk. I was scrolling through the M's in the people famous enough to have a movie made about them section of my brain. "You know," Charley said, a

little impatiently. "Harvey Milk. The gay politician in San Francisco who was assassinated along with the mayor in 1978." I vaguely remembered.

In 1978, I was a 28-year-old Art Director at *Saturday Night Live* in New York. I had lots of gay friends at the time. After all, I had been a theater major in college. However, 1978 was twenty-five years before I, myself, at midlife, would come out of the closet as a gay man.

Growing up in a fundamentalist Christian family in Oklahoma, I had married my college sweetheart whom I had known since high school and who remains my best friend to this day. Together, we pretty much missed Woodstock and the Summer of Love. As a young man struggling to comprehend my own sexuality, I pretty much missed or perhaps pretty much avoided noticing the Stonewall riots in New York, the gay liberation movement in San Francisco, the introduction of the rainbow flag, emerging Gay



Left: The third act of *TOSCA* was staged in the old Navy hangars on Treasure Island in the middle of San Francisco Bay for a scene of Milk watching the opera. We hung a lighting and rigging grid overhead and covered the rather uneven floor with a painted ground cloth. Below: A SketchUp® rendering of a morning-television-talk-show set. Harvey and Dan White appeared together on local talk shows. This little set got more attention during the making of the movie than anything else I designed. It took about fifteen minutes to design and two days to build and everybody loved it. I think it must be because I was at NBC in New York designing talk-show sets in 1978. To design it, all I had to do was close my eyes and it all came back to me, oversized flower arrangements and all. It seemed to feel very real to everyone. The walls of the gym were covered in blacks. We brought in period studio equipment, supplied rigging for lights and covered the floors.

Pride as expressed in rallies and parades in big cities across the United States, and, of course, the election of the first openly gay man to public office, Harvey Milk. It was a revolution that was happening in places far from southern Oklahoma. Even so, in 1978, no one missed the vitriol of Anita Bryant. She was everywhere and so was the uneasiness and homophobia that she and other bigots like John Briggs in California exploited.

As Charley spoke, I began to recall the assassination of Harvey Milk and George Moscone, the now famous Twinkie defense of

Dan White, Harvey's assassin, and then the White Night riots. A little exasperated, Charley said, "Just go to Wikipedia. But, call Dan and Bruce. GUS VAN SANT IS DIRECTING!" "How did you hear about all this?" I asked.

"I heard about it from Gilbert," Charley said. He meant Gilbert Baker. Charley and Gilbert have been friends for years. Because Gilbert designed and made the first rainbow flag that had its debuted in San Francisco in 1978 (the same year that Harvey was killed), he is sometimes called "the gay Betsy Ross." Gilbert, whom I had met through Charley a





Top: Milk's dining room after he and his partner Scott had been living there awhile. We were fortunate to have a few color photos of his real apartment which had lots of bright colors. We found the location with the ceiling this way and didn't touch it. It felt very "Harvey."

year or so earlier, was more than just a flag maker in the heady days of the gay revolution in San Francisco. He was a political activist and a performance artist, eventually becoming a member of the radical political activist troupe, the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. When describing the way information moves at lightning speed through the gay political activist community in San Francisco, Gilbert often refers to the "sister network." On this particular day, it seemed that I was the beneficiary of some peripheral connection to the "sister network."

"How did Gilbert hear about it?" I asked.

"I can't tell you that right now," Charley said. "But you know what they say. 'Telegraph, telephone, tell-a-fairy.'" You know, the "sister network."

I pulled off of Sunset into the nearly empty parking lot of an apartment complex just before Beverly Hills becomes West Hollywood. Parking in the shade of a eucalyptus tree, I called the Jinks/Cohen Company and asked for either

Dan or Bruce. Dan was out of the office. I was put through to Bruce. After a couple of minutes of catching up I told Bruce that I had heard that they were producing the movie about Harvey Milk. Bruce was shocked.

"Wow!" he said. "It just happened. We haven't even made our deal yet. How did you hear about this?"

"Well," I said, "You know, telegraph, telephone ... you know... news travels fast."

"OK," he said. "We don't really know much right now." Bruce assured me that I was already on their list. "Just stay in touch."

I did.

Back in New York in May, I started to read about Harvey Milk. I purchased Rob Epstein's documentary *The Times of Harvey Milk*. I read about the gay movement in San Francisco. I visited the *Summer of Love* exhibit at the Whitney Museum. I had several dinners

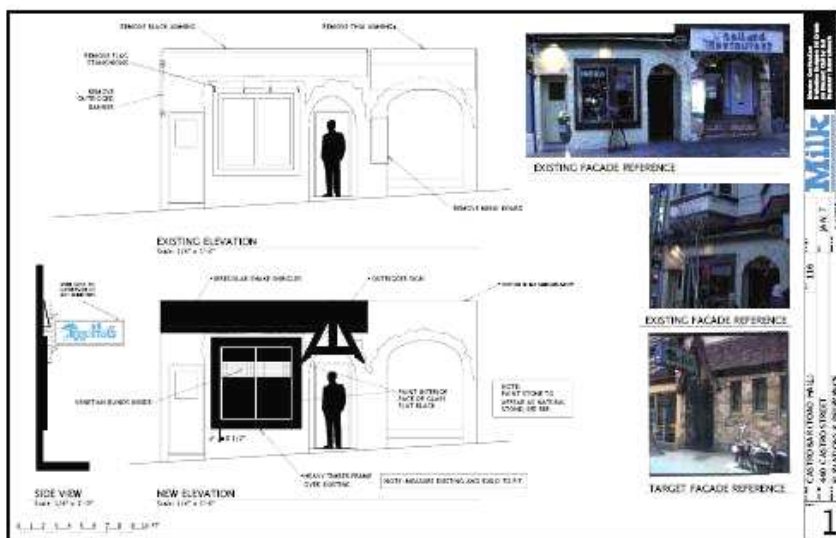
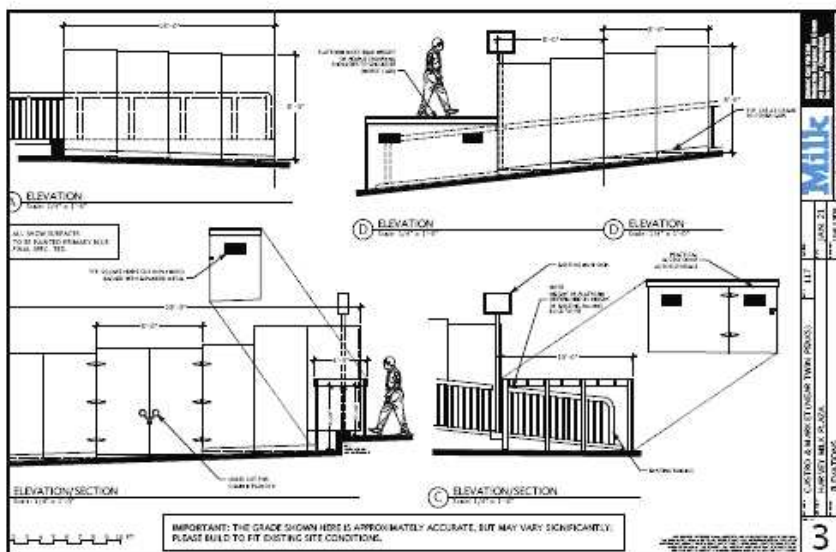
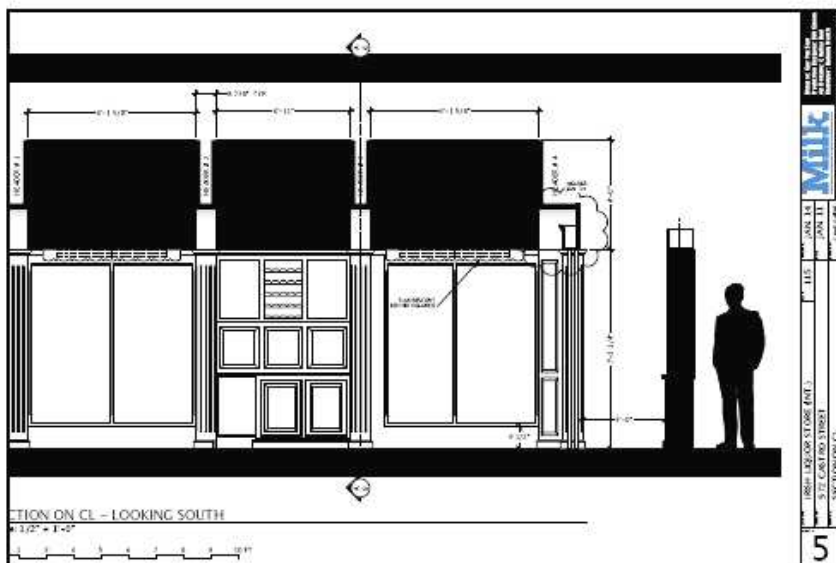
That wasn't the point. That remark struck me as a bit cynical. Cynicism can be too easy in this business. I had spent weeks learning about this man who brought so much hope to so many. I wasn't feeling cynical at all.

I wasn't flying to San Francisco to impress Gus. I was flying there to spend time there with the Harvey Milk story in my mind. I wanted to visualize the locations, to bring to life, even more strongly in my own mind, the events of the story. I wanted to really know what I was talking about when I would finally sit down with Gus, whether he would even know that I had gone to such lengths to prepare for the meeting or not. I simply wanted to know more about Harvey's life and the lives of those he touched. I wanted to know for myself.

A friend in San Francisco assured me that I was doing the right thing. "Tell the Universe what you want," he said. "Besides," he continued, "By the time you sit down with Gus, you will have built such a base of knowledge and confidence that there can only be one result. You're going to get this job." So, with that reassurance, I told the Universe what I wanted and I got on a plane.

The weekend was perfect. I stayed with my friend, Aggie Rogers, whom I hadn't seen in years. Aggie grew up in the Bay Area and has lived in Noe Valley, just over the hill from the Castro, since the seventies. The weather was spectacular. Aggie took me to all the places I had up to that point only read about. She showed me around the Castro, the location of Harvey's old camera shop, the Castro Theatre, and City Hall. I spent hours pouring over documents and photographs and artifacts at the San Francisco GLBT Historical Society. One evening I struck out on my own and walked the path of the famous memorial candlelight march down Market Street to City Hall. By the time the weekend was over, I felt that I had made a pilgrimage and that I had walked the "stations of the cross."

Back in New York, I prepared for my meeting with Gus that was now only a little more than a week away. That week, Gus met all the other Production Designers (maybe three or four) and costume designers in Los Angeles. I offered to fly to L.A. for the interview but the following



Above: Set Designer Chad Owens used Vectorworks® to execute the working drawings for the entire film.



Above: The 30' x 60' rainbow banner hanging from the balcony of the San Francisco City Hall. The flag, designed by Gilbert Baker in San Francisco in 1978, was created at Harvey Milk's suggestion and serves as a backdrop in the film for one of his political rallies.

week Gus was headed to New York to open *Paranoid Park* at the New York Film festival so it was decided that he would meet with me then. Meanwhile, I rented every Gus Van Sant movie that was available in New York. I screened everything from *Male Noche* to *Elephant*. Seeing all those great movies like *Drugstore Cowboy* and *My Own Private Idaho* again and his later work some of which I had not seen, like *Gerry* and *Elephant*, made for a great week. That week was an education and a revelation in the art of storytelling.

Thursday, the phone rang and it was a friend in Los Angeles who had interviewed for the costume design position.

"How was it?" I asked.

"Well, he didn't say much," she said. "The first thing he asked for was my book."

"Your books?"

I had heard about the job before anyone. I had phoned everyone who had ever even heard of Gus Van Sant. I had pestered Dan and Bruce and Sean and all of my agents at Gersh all summer long. I had read and highlighted everything I could get my hands on about Harvey Milk and San Francisco in the seventies. I had screened all of Gus' movies and even some rather obscure films that he is known to like. I had flown myself all the way across the country to walk in Harvey Milk's footsteps. I had

done everything I could think of, I had asked the Universe to give me *Milk* but, I DIDN'T HAVE A BOOK! Through neglect or arrogance or maybe just laziness, I had made it that far in my career without a book. I DIDN'T HAVE A BOOK!

"Yes," she said. "The first thing he asked for was my book."

In the roughly ninety-six hours between "The first thing he asked for was my book" and my interview, I did the following: I dug through dozens of dusty boxes in my attic to find every photo that existed from past work. I called everyone I could think of that might have photos of my sets. I downloaded a frame capture program onto my laptop. I learned how to use it. I collected DVDs of all of the movies that I've designed. I spent roughly sixty-four of those ninety-six hours printing, selecting, trimming and assembling photos into a reasonably representative collection of my work. I dropped the collection into a handsome dark grey archive box and Monday afternoon, with my "book" under my arm, I was off to meet Gus Van Sant.

On Friday, I had received the following email: *You're set to meet with Gus at three forty-five this Monday at the Time Warner Theatre. Please call Gus at three forty-five and you guys will figure out a place to go.*

Paranoid Park was being presented at the Time Warner Theatre. The plan was for Gus to give his introduction to the film at around three thirty after which we would meet. Gus would then return to the theatre for the Q&A. The email said, "you guys will figure out a place to go."

Now ... the Time Warner Center is huge new glistening tower on Columbus Circle that houses Time Warner, Inc., The Mandarin Hotel, a huge luxury condominium tower and at the base of it all, a gigantic urban multi-level shopping mall that contains dozens of restaurants and among other things the Time Warner Theatre. So, "you guys will figure out a place to go" sounded like a bad plan to me. I couldn't imagine in my first meeting with Gus Van Sant, *THE* Gus Van Sant, wandering around a shopping mall with my dark-grey archive box tucked under my arm looking a place to sit down and talk. So on Monday afternoon,

taking no chances, I got to the Time Warner Center an hour and a half early and started a tour of every restaurant in the center. I stuck my head inside a new place on the north side of the building. It was casual and stylish with great views of Broadway heading uptown and Central Park. Great! I explained to the manager that I had a very important business meeting at around three forty-five and made arrangements with her to sit for as long as I needed at a table by the window. At three forty-five on the dot, I called Gus and I invited him down to the cafe. Gus was charming and relaxed and talkative. I was over prepared and as nervous as I have ever been in a meeting. It felt like I had bet everything on this one interview. But as we talked, we seemed to hit it off. After about forty-five minutes I said, "Would you like to see my book?" He said, "I'd love to but you know, I don't think I can, I have to get back very soon for the Q&A."

I think in the past I might have just said, "Well, thank you so much for meeting me" and let it go at that, but I had invested so much and I was in some new totally proactive frame of mind so I surprised myself when I said, "Well,

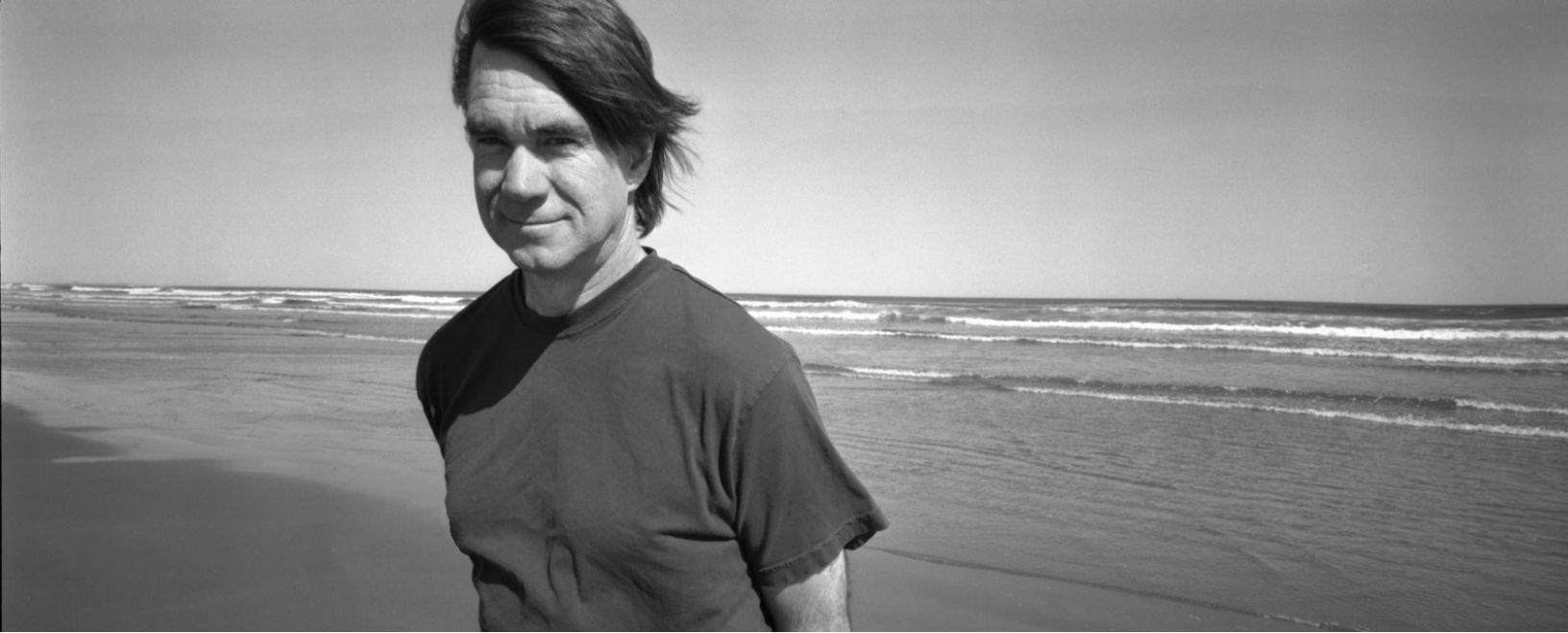
you know, I could just hang around here until you're through." In my head I thought... "He's getting out of here without seeing this damned book!"

Gus said, "I'd like that." So that's what we did. In all, the meeting lasted almost four hours. The sun went down, we ordered martinis, and swapped personal stories. I talked about my life and shared my coming out story and he talked about his.

A couple of days later, I got a call from Dan and Bruce. Gus was back in Los Angeles and I had the job. A month later, I was living in the Castro. I found the apartment online. It was a charming sort of garrett apartment in a beautiful 1880's building on Sharon Street. The views from the bedroom window of Mission Dolores and the surrounding rooftops in the morning fog looked like Florence. The building had four apartments built above a large industrial space with huge carriage doors opening onto the street. When I handed the landlord the check and he handed me the keys, I asked what the industrial space on the street level had been. The landlord replied, "A milk factory." I just smiled. **ADG**

Below: The Golden Gate Bridge at sunset, its bands of colors echoing Gilbert Baker's rainbow flag, was a regular sight at the end of a each filming day.





Gus Van Sant's new film, *Milk*, tells the real-life story of Harvey Milk (played in the film by Sean Penn), who became the first openly gay person to be elected to a public office in the United States when he took his post on the San Francisco board of city supervisors in January 1977. Milk was a transplanted New Yorker who, at the age of 40, traded in his job as a Wall Street analyst for a gig working as a stage manager on the first Broadway production of *Hair*, and later moved to San Francisco where he and his partner opened a camera shop in the Castro district—then the flash point of the gay-rights movement in America. But Milk's political awakening with regards to his sexuality in many ways mirrored what the country itself was going through at the time, in the wake of free love and before AIDS. It was a moment when singer Anita Bryant's infamous state-to-state crusade to have laws repealed that prohibited discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation had inadvertently begun to crack open the proverbial closet door by inspiring an army of men and women to come forward and speak out against her. Though Milk had relationships with men in New York, he had shielded his personal life from his family and co-workers. But living in San Francisco, surrounded by people who were often much younger than he was—many of whom with stories much like his own—he very easily fell into the role of advocate, lobbying on behalf of the gay community both freely and loudly.

When Milk assumed his seat on the board of supervisors, it seemed a logical, even inevitable, next step in the sexual revolution of the decade. But his assassination just 10 months into his term, by former city supervisor Dan White—an early supporter of Milk's from an Irish Catholic, working-class neighborhood adjacent to the Castro, who shot Milk in his City Hall office minutes after shooting and killing Mayor George Moscone—only brought into even more stark relief the harsh, at times tragic, realities of America's continuing struggle with sex and sexuality.

For the 56-year-old Van Sant, *Milk* was a project nearly two decades in the making—one that went through multiple scripts and iterations. Writer Armistead Maupin, who, of course, lived through the Milk years in San Francisco, having so memorably captured them in his *Tales of the City* novels, recently spoke to the director who was at home in Portland, Oregon.

ARMISTEAD MAUPIN: Watching *Milk* was a very eerie experience for me because I've never been to a film before where I knew maybe six or eight of the major characters in real life. There must have been huge pressure on you with this project from the beginning, at least in part because it also belonged to somebody else for 16 years. The idea of making a film based on Randy Shilts's book, *The Mayor of Castro Street*, was floating around Hollywood for a long time. You were even at one point considered as a director for that project, and then, when [Dustin] Lance Black came up with the script for *Milk*—I guess in 2007—you had a whole other direction to run in, in terms of getting the thing made. If you hadn't succeeded, I suppose there would have been a serious shit storm.

GUS VAN SANT: I think I first heard about the film project based on Randy's book through Rob Epstein [who won an Oscar for his 1984 documentary *The Times of Harvey Milk*]. I might have been aware of the book, but I hadn't read it. At that time, there was talk that Oliver Stone was going to direct the film, but he sort of declared that he wasn't going to make another assassination project after *JFK* [1991]. When I first talked to the people who were involved with the film at the time, they mentioned that you had been contacted by Stephen Frears about making it, and that you had advised him against it. This was about 17 years ago. I think what I heard was that you had advised him against doing it because you didn't think he could ever show what actually went on in the Castro in the '70s.

AM: Well, no, that's not entirely true, but I did advise him against directing the particular script that he had. He never made an offer to me to write a script for him—if he had, I might have seriously thought about it. But what he showed me was extraordinarily cardboard and politically correct and uninteresting. It felt like a television biopic. He felt the same way about it, and, at that point, I guess he decided not to do it.

GVS: Oh, too bad you didn't write a version.

AM: I don't think I could have done any better than Lance Black did. It's astonishing to think that someone of his age could understand the permutations of San Francisco in the '70s, but he did. How did he come to you exactly?

GVS: Well, it had been a long time since I had thought of doing a story about Harvey. At one point, I'd thought of doing it in a sort of fictional fashion, where the character wasn't named Harvey Milk and where we'd shoot it in Portland, Oregon, and make it about a guy who owned a camera shop—just to get away from the biopic element where you had to show the real guy, which was sort of frightening. The biopic also wasn't a form that I necessarily believed in, because you can never really get it right, you know? It's also a form that's very popular—the straight-ahead biopic. So people were always sort of stirring the idea of what to do if they were to make a film about Harvey Milk. And then one day a number of years ago, Cleve

Jones [one of Milk's associates] told me that there were these two guys—he called them angels—who knocked on his door and announced to him that they were going to make a musical about Cleve's life. One of them was Lance. Now, I had actually met Lance before at Bobby Bukowski's house—Bobby Bukowski is a cinematographer who I knew through River Phoenix. Sometime around 2001, during a dinner one night at Bobby's house, I had met Lance, who was introduced to me as a young, blond-haired film student who was working in commercials. Then, last year, Cleve called me again very enthusiastically and said that Lance had written a story. It wasn't the musical any longer—it was a story about Harvey, and they wanted to come up to Portland from San Francisco to show it to me. I was going to L.A., so we met there, and that was where I first saw the script for Milk. It was sort of like what we have as our final script, and its focus was on the politics of the time. The personal parts of the story were always kind of filtered through the politics, which I'd never seen done before, really. But I was completely engrossed. Then, I thought, "Well, this is all politics. It's going to be really tricky to make it work because the audience usually starts to tune out when there are too many political ideas." Yet the script didn't really make you do that. So we went ahead and had faith.

AM: How did you get the script to Sean Penn?

GVS: After I read Lance's script, we sort of conspired about who our favorite person to play Harvey would be, and we thought of Sean. These days, you can look up your actors on YouTube as you're thinking about them, and we found a lot of YouTube instances of Sean speaking in front of different groups of people. He is always so secure when he's speaking in public, which was one of the things that Harvey was really good at, and Sean, of course, is an amazing actor, so we thought we'd be well-served if he'd agree to do the film. So we just called him up. It was a very short phone call, as calls can sometimes be with Sean, and I said, "You know, we want to offer you this role playing Harvey Milk." And he just said, "I'm interested," which was pretty much positive, and then the next step was for him to read the screenplay.

AM: One of the things that struck me when I saw the film was how you caught that kind of gritty street thing that you did in *Drugstore Cowboy* [1989].

GVS: Well, that's what I'm always trying for, but I never know whether it actually happens. There are all kinds of ways that people present their films, but that's kind of a good feeling, if you can make it seem like the characters are really there.

AM: Especially since you had such a responsibility to a number of living people who remember the characters and the events that are shown in the film. I guess Bryan Singer was attached to one of the other Milk projects in development, right?

GVS: Yeah.

AM: I read somewhere that he wanted Kevin Spacey to play Harvey Milk and, at that point, I decided that he might not be the right director at all if he couldn't see the irony in that. [Van Sant laughs] But I think that was back when Bryan himself wasn't out of the closet. What was it like while you were filming? You were working out on Treasure Island [in the San Francisco Bay] part of the time, right?

GVS: We had a couple of sets out there. One of them was Harvey's apartment in New York City. There's a sex scene that takes place in that apartment, so we wanted to make it kind of rarefied in a sense. Treasure Island was a strange, very cold place. Was it a naval base at one point?

AM: I processed out of the Navy there in 1970.

GVS: You did?

AM: Yeah. My first glimpse of San Francisco was from Treasure Island.

GVS: That's so interesting. I didn't put it together while we were filming, but it makes a lot of sense. There was no heat, so it was kind of like working in a cave. But most of the rest of the film was shot on location.

AM: Well, with Harvey's camera store, it must have been a true rarity to be filming on the exact spot where something happened. You re-converted a rather stylish home-furnishing shop into his funky, old digs.

GVS: Yeah, we worked from a lot of pictures. There were scenes that took place at the camera shop during all these different periods of time, so we had the early-'70s look and then the more developed, mid-'70s look. Tom Randall and Gilbert Baker are a couple of the folks who helped us bring it back to its original state.

AM: I was extremely struck by your depiction of Dan White [the city supervisor who assassinated Milk in 1978]. Josh Brolin's performance was so sensitive—there are many times when you actually feel sorry for the guy, where you can see in his eyes some sort of envy for Harvey's sense of direction and his leadership abilities and his certainty about who he was. All of that is there in the performance, and it makes it truly into a Greek tragedy when the assassination occurs.

GVS: Oh, that's great.

AM: But another thing that struck me, I guess because of my advancing years, is the way you reflected the fact that Harvey was basically a middle-aged guy who landed in San Francisco and who had been quite conservative up to a certain point. He and I were both [Barry] Goldwater Republicans back in '64. We were both naval officers, and we both found a way out with the help of a theatrical troupe. In



Harvey's case, it was the cast of *Hair* in New York City. But it was fascinating to see this guy, who might have felt that the more interesting parts of his life were over, finding himself with younger men in this new city leading a revolution.

GVS: I think Harvey always, at least in my understanding of the story, led a pretty gay life, but it was closeted in the face of his parents and in the face of his work—you know, there are all the stories of Fire Island in the early '60s and going out with Joe Campbell, who was one of the early Warhol Superstars. Harvey was conservative, but he was like a New York City conservative—he had a nightlife and a gay life. I think there are also stories of Harvey being rounded up in Central Park in the '50s. There was even a scene in one version of the script where Harvey, at a young age, had sex in the balcony at the opera in New York. So it's interesting that he always had a pretty well acknowledged gay life, yet technically he was in the closet. And it worried him that his boyfriends belonged to organizations that were leafleting people in his building. He felt that was too much. But then I also think that he got kind of swept up in the '60s when he burned his BankAmericard and made that switch from conservative Wall Street analyst to becoming a theater stage director for Tom O'Horgan when they made *Hair*. He even grew his own hair long. I think that was a transformative period for him. Then, when he got to San Francisco and got to be with a lot of other guys who had sort of gone through that, the whole idea was to be yourself and not be in the closet or conceal parts of your life—to be up front.

AM: He also had the good sense to know how to play the game politically. He got himself that little polyester suit that he could troop around in and look like a politician. He shaved his beard and made himself presentable in an effort to deliver a rather radical political agenda for the times. I think that early conservatism is something he maybe punished himself for a little bit, and it made him that much more adamant about people declaring themselves. His entire message was about coming out of the closet.

GVS: There was one little aspect I thought we missed in our movie. We didn't really get to comment on it, but there was a guy who told me that when Harvey shaved off his beard and put on a suit, the hippies really got on him for that. His friends who worked at his camera shop—some of them stopped working there —because they felt like he was selling out.

AM: But even though Harvey was learning how to play the game, he never, ever, compromised himself politically, which was tremendously satisfying to those of us who were coming out at the time. Anita Bryant was the impetus for me to come out—when she declared her anti-gay campaign, the next day in the San Francisco Chronicle I had my gay character hold forth on it. I think she may have launched Harvey's career and the entire modern gay movement.

GVS: She galvanized the movement.

AM: Did *Brokeback Mountain* [2005] help you a great deal in terms of getting this film green-lit? It must have, simply in terms of Hollywood's way of looking at things.

GVS: Yeah, I'm sure it did. It's hard to say, because *Brokeback Mountain* made money and was a critical success, and that always speaks to Hollywood. I was actually surprised to find that there weren't many gay projects in the works in Hollywood when we started our movie. I was always under the impression that there were a lot of them out there because of *Brokeback Mountain*, but I guess not. It definitely helped that our distributor, Focus Features, is the same studio that did *Brokeback Mountain*. I'm sure that they were encouraged by their own success with that film.

AM: So what for you was the biggest challenge in making *Milk*?

GVS: I was always trying to get Lance to write a scene where the characters were just kind of talking about something other than politics, which he was averse to doing.

AM: Well, our lives were politics back then.

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SEAN [PENN] READ [THE SCRIPT], AND
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SAID, 'YOU KNOW,
WE NEED A REALLY BIG SEX SCENE RIGHT
UP FRONT.'

—GUS VAN SANT

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GVS: But that was something that I was personally worried about, that the characters didn't just kind of lay back and talk about anything else. But it's interesting how that was one of my concerns—whether there was enough quote-unquote downtime. We didn't have a lot of scenes in bars—or any actually. There was one celebration we filmed which isn't in the final movie, so we never really see that side of the Castro, and I was always kind of afraid that would be a bad thing. I just think the responsibility of making this movie—of representing an entire generation, an entire new class of gay men that existed in the '70s—was scary.

AM: Well, the way you showed the class division between gay men was very astute. I thought that the way you showed David Goodstein [then-publisher and owner of *The Advocate*] and his support for the Democratic candidate Rick Stokes, who was running against Harvey Milk . . . Most people don't know that Harvey ran against a gay man for city supervisor and that there was this sense of the good, respectable, suit-and-tie gay man and then the hippies in the streets who Harvey represented. Whose brilliant idea was it to cast Howard Rosenman [an executive producer of the Emmy-nominated documentary *The Celluloid Closet*, 1995] as David Goodstein?

GVS: That was my idea. I was always looking for somebody who looked a little bit like David Goodstein, at least in the photographs that I'd seen.

AM: Well, here's a loaded question: How was it working with Sean Penn?

GVS: Great. I think we were pretty well matched. We didn't know each other that well beforehand. Sean has a lot of stuff that he does to get ready by himself. He puts a lot of work into things on his own, and I think that's good in terms of allowing the actor to kind of bring what they've devised to the role . . . I was about to say something that I probably shouldn't say.

AM: Well, you could . . .

GVS: We talked about sex scenes because originally Lance had written a very elaborate one between Harvey and Scott [Smith, Milk's longtime partner] into the script. And then, as we sent the script out to different financiers and actors, we were afraid that the sex scene would put people off. But you kind of have to start big, you know, because otherwise—

AM: There's nowhere to come down from.

GVS: Yeah. You have to get people to jump in the water early. So there was this sex scene, but we took it out because we didn't want people to freak out and not read the rest of the script. So we sent the script to everybody without the sex scene. Sean read it, and then when we had our first big meeting with him, he said, "You know, we need a really big sex scene right up front." And we said, "Oh, we've got it!" ●●●